

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5976

INFO AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 0147

USIA FOR ILA

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, NU

SUBJECT: MEDIA CENSORSHIP CONTINUES

SUMMARY: MARTIAL LAW INVOKED DURING THE FSLN TERRORIST INCIDENT PROVIDED LEGAL BASIS FOR NEWS MEDIA CENSORSHIP WHICH TOMORROW ENTERS THIRD WEEK WITH FRICTION AND FRUSTRATIONS BEGINNING TO SHOW. DISSEMINATION OF VOA MATERIAL IS ALSO BEING AFFECTED BY CENSORS STRICT ADHERENCE TO ORDERS TO PRE-CLEAR ALL MATERIAL WITHOUT EXCEPTION. CONTINUATION OF CENSORSHIP DESPITE SOMOZA'S KNOWN SENSITIVITY TO U.S. PUBLIC OPINION IS INDICATIVE OF HIS FEAR THAT MEDIA, ESPECIALLY LA PRENSA, MIGHT CONTRIBUTE TO TENSE CLIMATE IF GIVEN THE CHANCE.

1. MILITARY CENSORS CONTINUE SEVERE RESTRICTIONS ON NEWS COVERAGE, IMPOSED DECEMBER 28 UNDER MARTIAL LAW POWERS INVOKED DURING THE FSLN TERRORIST ATTACK. ALTHOUGH NO WRITTEN GUIDELINES HAVE
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BEEN PROVIDED, RADIO AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS AS WELL AS MANAGUA'S

NEWSPAPERS ARE REQUIRED TO PRE-CLEAR ALL THEIR MATERIAL, AND CENSORS REPORTEDLY ARE EXERCISING WIDE UNSUPERVISED LATITUDE IN DISALLOWING OFFENSIVE ARTICLES. RADIO NEWSMEN STATE THEY ARE PARTICULARLY CONCERNED AT EFFORTS BY CENSORS TO REWRITE STORIES BEFORE ALLOWING THEM TO BE BROADCAST.

2. PRIMARY TARGET OF CENSORCHIPS, OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER LA PRENSA, CONTINUES PUBLICATION BUT IN HIGHLY SANITIZED FORM. ONLY OPPOSITION SENTIMENT IT HAS PUBLISHED SINCE IMPOSITION OF CENSORSHIP WAS DIRECTOR PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO'S LETTER IN RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S ATTACK ON HIM IN DECEMBER 31 SPEECH. CHAMORRO'S FAMILY EDITORIALS HAVE BEEN CONSPICUOUSLY ABSENT.

3. TELEVISION NEWSMEN REPORT CENSORS WOULD NOT PERMIT AIRING OF INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT OF COFFEE PRODUCERS WHICH MENTIONED PROBABLY LOSSES IN COFFEE CROP THIS YEAR BECAUSE OF CLIMATORY FACTORS AND LACK OF PICKERS. EFE CORRESPONDENT IN MANAGUA INDICATES HE HAS BEEN UNABLE TO FILE STORIES SINCE TERRORIST INCIDENT AND WAS PERMITTED TO RECEIVE MATERIAL OVER HIS TELETYPE ONLY AS JANUARY 7 AND ONLY AFTER APPEALING TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA HIMSELF. RADIO AND TELEVISION CODE ADMINISTRATOR LTCOL LUNA PROHIBITED HIM FROM REPORTING SOMOZA'S SPEECH TO NATIONAL GUARD ENLISTED MEN WHICH WAS AIRED LIVE ON NATIONAL RADIO AND SUBSEQUENTLY CARRIED IN SOMOZA OWNED NOVEDADES. CORRESPONDENTS IN GENERAL REPORTEDLY CONTCSUE HAVING PROBLEMS WITH TELEPHONE COMMUNICATIONS BEING CUT AS THEY ATTEMPT TO PHONE IN SOTRIES TO MAIN OFFICES ABROAD.

4. NO EXCEPTIONS ARE BEING MADE FOR CUMBERSONE CENSORSHIP PROCEDURE AND EARLY MORNING RADIO NEWS PROGRAMS, NICARAGUANS' FAVORED SOURCE OF LATE NEWS IN A COUNTRY WITH NO MORNING NEWS-PAPERS, HAVE ESPECIALLY SUFFERED.

5. VOA CORRESPONDENTS' REPORTS AND IPS MATERIALS MUST BE CLEARED BY END USERS IF SUCH MATERIAL BECOMES INTEGRAL PART OF PROGRAM. THIS HAS RESULTED IN RADIO COMMENTATORS' DROPPING AGENCY-ORIGINATED MATERIAL FROM EVENING SHOWS, AND RECORDED PORTIONS OF "BUENOS DIAS AMERICA" PROGRAM FROM EARLY
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MORNING PROGRAMS,6

#9. COMMENT: DESPITE THE APRIL 1974 EXPERIENCE WITH CENSORSHIP (WHEN LA PRENSA CLOSED DOWN FOR 11 DAYS) AND LTCOL LUNA'S CONTINUOUS MONITORING OF THE ELECTRONIC MEDIA, STRICT CENSORSHIP IS VERY MUCH OF A NOVELY FOR NICARAGUA. IN VIEW OF SOMOZA'S CONSTANT CONCERN ABOUT HIS IMAGE IN THE U.S. AND HIS SENSITIVITY TO CHARGES THAT HE SHACKLES FREE EXPRESSION, THE CONTINUED

IMPOSITION OF CENSORSHIP DESPITE THESE CONSIDERATIONS SUGGESTS
THE EXTENT OF SOMOZA'S FEAR THAT PARTS OF THE MEDIA WOULD
EXACERBATE THE FEELING OF TENSION ENGENDERED BY THE FSLN AFFAIR
IF GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY.
WARNER

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